



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
P.O. Box 45040, Olympia, Washington 98504-5010

February 3, 2006

TO: Children's Administration All Staff and Caregivers

FROM: Cheryl Stephani, Assistant Secretary
Children's Administration

**SUBJECT: EDUCATION ADVOCACY PROGRAM AND SOCIAL WORKER
EDUCATION ADVOCACY PRACTICE GUIDE**

I am pleased to announce the launch of a new, ground-breaking Educational Advocacy Program. Beginning this month, social workers will have a new resource available as they work to support the educational success and well-being needs of students in out-of-home care. Through this statewide initiative, Education Advocacy Coordinators will be located in the regions to provide a broad range of education advocacy. Each region will have either one full time coordinator or two part time coordinators depending on their geography.

The Education Advocacy Program is designed to improve educational outcomes in the following areas:

- Academic achievement (grades, GPA)
- Attendance issues / trancies
- Behavior and discipline in school (suspensions, expulsions)
- Accessing school-based services (Special Education, 504 Plans)
- Other obstacles to foster youth's success in school.

This program is an expansion of the successful Treehouse model in Region 4, in which Treehouse placed educational advocates in local offices to work in tandem with social workers, caregivers, and youth. The model is simple and collaborative. By focusing on the individual educational needs of foster youth, Educational Advocacy Coordinators work to improve the educational success of youth in foster care.

Improved educational outcomes will be achieved by:

- Providing individual case consultation and advocacy for all school aged children and youth in out-of-home care identified as having unmet education needs;
- Providing support to social workers, caregivers, and youth to navigate through the school system and other agencies that provide educational services;
- Providing education advocacy training on a variety of topics for social workers, caregivers, and other providers to identify and solve routine school-related issues.

To support the implementation of the Education Advocacy Program, CA has developed an Education Advocacy Practice Guide for Social Workers. This guide provides social workers with a case management check list of suggested tasks and actions to assist social workers with education planning. The guide also includes information on topics such as:

- School readiness,
- Evaluations for special education,
- Navigating the IEP process,
- Graduation requirements,
- Planning for post secondary education, and
- Tips on engaging children, youth, and caregivers in the education process.

This is just the beginning of many innovative approaches to address the well-being needs of children and youth in foster care. I would like to thank the Washington State Legislature for funding the Educational Advocacy Program. Together we are laying the foundation for children in our care to reap the rewards that come with a good education.

CA social workers will find information on the Education Advocacy Program, the Education Advocacy Practice Guide, referral forms and other related education materials by visiting the CA intranet at <http://ca.dshs.wa.gov/intranet/main/camain.asp> Caregivers will find more information by visiting the CA web site, foster parent's page at <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/index.asp>. If you have questions regarding the Education Advocacy Program, please feel free to contact the Education Program Manager at DSHS CA Outcomes@dshs.wa.gov.